

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-07 IO-13 TRSE-00 SSM-03 MCT-01
AID-05 COME-00 EB-08 FRB-03 XMB-02 OPIC-03 LAB-04
SIL-01 OMB-01 DHA-02 /121 W
-----311719Z 100116 /45

P R 311541Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3503
INFO SIT-REP COLLECTIVE 245
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER
USNMR SHAPE BELGIUM
CINCUSNAVEUR, LONDON ENG
CINCUSAFE RAMSTEIN AB GER
COMSIXTHFLT
CTF SIX ZERO
CTF SIX ONE
CTF SIX TWO
CTG SIX ZERO PT TWO
FICEURLANT NORFOLK VA
FOSIF ROTA SPAIN
DIA WASHDC
CINCUSAREUR HEIDELBERG GER
USDOCOSOUTH NAPLES IT

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 1440

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI, PINS, PINT, LE
SUBJECT: LEBANESE SITUATION MARCH 25-31

REF: BEIRUT 1324 (DTG 241542Z MAR 77)

1. SUMMARY: THIS WEEK THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS APPOINTED
VICTOR KHOURY AS HEAD OF THE LEBANESE ARMY, DESPITE FIERCE
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CHAMOUNIST OPPOSITION AND NOT BEFORE A BOMB EXPLODED AT
THE HOME OF DEFENSE MINISTER BOUTROS AND A "GENERAL STRIKE"
WAS CALLED IN EAST BEIRUT. THE ARAB LEAGUE EXTENDED THE
MANDATE OF THE ARAB SECURITY FORCES (ASF) FOR SIX MONTHS.
CHRISTIAN FORCES CAPTURED AL TAYYIBAH IN THE SOUTH.
THE ARSLAN FAMILY MADE A GESTURE OF RECONCILIATION TOWARD
THE JUNBLATT FAMILY. THE ARAB STATES REPORTEDLY MADE A

TENTATIVE DECISION TO GIVE LEBANON LL 6-7 BILLION (OVER US \$2 BILLION). TRAFFIC IN THE PORT OF BEIRUT CONTINUED TO INCREASE. SAEB SALAM VISITED CAIRO. END SUMMARY.

2. NEW ARMY COMMANDER.

A. ON MARCH 28, IN ITS MOST CONTROVERSIAL AND DECISIVE STEP TO DATE, THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS PROMOTED COLONEL VICTOR KHOURY TO BRIGADIER AND APPOINTED HIM TO REPLACE HANNA SAID AS COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF THE LEBANESE ARMY, DESPITE THE DETERMINED OPPOSITION OF CHRISTIAN HARDLINERS LED BY CAMILLE CHAMOUN. A 48 YEAR OLD MARONITE, KHOURY WAR FORMERLY COMMANDER OF THE NORTHER LEBANON DISTRICT AND IS CONSIDERED TO BE CLOSE TO THE SYRIANS. LEBANESE MILITARY SOURCES CONSIDER THAT KHOURY WILL BE ACCEPTABLE TO MUSLIM OFFICERS AND MOST CHRISTIANS, BUT NOT TO EXTREME RIGHTIST OFFICER.

B. DEFENSE MINISTER BOUTROS TOLD THE PRESS THAT KHOURY'S APPOINTMENT IS A "PREPARATION FOR STUDYING SOUND BASES FOR THE REORGANIZATION OF THE ARMY." BOUTROS ALSO REMARKED THAT THE REPLACEMENT OF SAID "HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH HIS PERSON," AND THAT THE GOL IS CONSIDERING HIM FOR A DIPLOMATIC POST.

3. ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT.

KHOURY'S APPOINTMENT WAS PRECEDED BY AN ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT AGAINST DEFENSE MINISTER FUAD
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BOUTROS. AT 0200 HOURS ON MARCH 27, NINE POUNDS OF PLASTIC EXPLODED IN BOUTROS' APARTMENT HOUSE. THERE WAS EXTENSIVE MATERIAL DAMAGE AND ONE PERSON NOT BELONGING TO BOUTROS' HOUSEHOLD WAS SLIGHTLY WOUNDED. BOUTROS TOLD THE PRESS THAT THE PEOPLE RESPONSIBLE "WANTED TO SUPPRESS ME AND NOT JUST DETER ME." EITHER "LEBANESE FRONT" RADICALS OR DISGRUNTLED RIGHTIST ARMY OFFICERS ARE PLAUSIBLE CULPRITS, BUT NO EVIDENCE POINTING TO THE PERPETRATORS HAS YET EMERGED.

4. GENERAL STRIKE.

A. HANNA SAID'S DISMISSAL WAS STRONGLY OPPOSED BY CAMILLE CHAMOUN'S NATIONAL LIBERAL PARTY. CHAMOUN REPORTEDLY WARNED PRESIDENT SARKIS THAT SAID'S REPLACEMENT WOULD BE REGARDED AS AN UNACCEPTABLE AFFRONT TO LEBANESE CHRISTIANS. ON MARCH 27 THERE WAS SHOOTING IN THE AIR AND BURNING OF TIRES IN EAST BEIRUT. IN THE EARLY HOURS OF MARCH 28, THE NATIONAL LIBERAL PARTY DISTRIBUTED TRACTS CALLING FOR

A "GENERAL STRIKE," TO PROTEST SAID'S DISMISSAL. SHOPS AND SCHOOLS WERE GENERALLY CLOSED IN EAST BEIRUT ON MARCH 28 AND 29.

B. THE CALL FOR THE STRIKE EXACERBATED TENSIONS WITHIN THE KFUR FRONT. THE PHALANGE PARTY, HEADED BY PIERRE GEMAYEL, ISSUED A COMMUNIQUE STRONGLY CONDEMNING THE STRIKE AS "NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR WHICH SHOULD BE REJECTED," BUT CAREFULLY AVOIDING CRITICISM OF KFUR FRONT ALLIES BY NAME. GEMAYEL PERSONALLY CALLED FOR "MODERATION" AND A "POSITIVE ATTITUDE" FOR THE SAKE OF PUBLIC TRANQUILITY. IN THE FACE OF GEMAYEL'S OPPOSITION, THE CHAMOUN CAMP BACKED DOWN, AND THE STRIKE WAS OVER BY MARCH 30.

5. EXTENSION OF ASF MANDATE.

THE ARAB LEAGUE COUNCIL MET IN CAIRO ON MARCH 27 AND
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EXTENDED THE MANDATE OF THE ARAB SECURITY FORCES (ASF) IN LEBANON FOR SIX MONTHS BEGINNING APRIL 27. THE COUNCIL ALSO EXTENDED FOR TWO MONTHS THE TERM OF THE QUADRIPARTITE COMMITTEE. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, THE FUNDING RATIO REMAINS SAME AS BEFORE: SAUDI ARABIA AND KUWAIT, \$18 MILLION EACH (20 PERCENT); UNITED ARAB EMIRATES \$13.5 MILLION (15 PERCENT); AND QTAR, \$9 MILLION (10 PERCENT), WITH THE REMAINDER DIVIDED AMONG THE OTHER ARAB LEAGUE STATES. ACCORDING TO THE BEIRUT PRESS, HOWEVER, ONLY \$60 MILLION OF THE \$90 MILLION NEEDED TO FINANCE THE ASF FOR ITS FIRST SIX MONTHS HAS BEEN PAID SO FAR.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 1440

6. CHRISTIAN OFFENSIVE CONTINUES IN THE SOUTH.

ACCORDING TO LEBANESE MILITARY SOURCES, CHRISTIAN FORCES
TOOK THE VILLAGE OF AL TAYYIBAH IN THE SOUTH ON MARCH 30.
THE ACTION WAS REPORTEDLY MARKED BY HEAVY EXCHANGES OF
ARTILLERY FIRE AGAINST THE DEFENDING FORCE MADE UP OF
PALESTINIANS, PRO-IRAQI BAATHI AND IMAM MUSA SADR'S MAHRUMIN
SHIA MILITIA. A CHRISTIAN MECHANIZED ATTACK OF APPROXI-
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MATELY TWENTY TANKS AND APC'S SEIZED THE VILLAGE AND SUR-
ROUNDING HIGH GROUND AND INFLICTED MODERATE CASUALTIES
ON THE DEFENDERS. MILITARY SOURCE REPORTED THAT THE CHRIS-
TIAN FORCES CONSIDERED AL TAYYIBAH TO BE AN INTERMEDIATE
OBJECTIVE FROM WHICH THEY COULD CONTINUE THEIR ATTACK ON
BINT JUBAYL.

7. ARSLAN CALL ON JUNBLATT.

IN A GESTURE OF RECONCILIATION, MAJID ARSLAN WENT TO
MUKHATARAH ON MARCH 26 TO OFFER HIS CONDOLENCES TO WALID
JUNBLATT FOR THE DEATH OF HIS FATHER. THE ARSLAN AND
JUNBLATT FAMILIES ARE TRADITIONAL RIVALS FOR DRUZE
LEADERSHIP.

8. ARAB AID.

PRIME MINISTER SALIM AL-HOSS MET WITH CHIEFS OF

MISSION FROM SAUDI ARABIA, KUWAIT, AND QATAR ON MARCH 26 IN BEIRUT TO DISCUSS ARAB AID TO LEBANON. MEANWHILE, THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE KUWAIT FUND FOR ARAB ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT, ABDUL LATIF AL-HAMAD, TOLD OUR EMBASSY IN KUWAIT THAT THE ARAB STATES HAD PROVISIONALLY AGREED IN RIYADH ON MARCH 21 TO PREPARE A TWO PHASE PROGRAM OF ASSISTANCE TO LEBANON. FIRST, AN APPEAL WOULD BE MADE TO ARAB AND OTHER STATES FOR LL 500 MILLION FOR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE. ACCORDING TO THE DIRECTOR GENERAL, SAUDI ARABIA AND KUWAIT HAVE ALREADY AGREED TO GIVE LL 80 MILLION AND LL 30 MILLION RESPECTIVELY FOR THIS PURPOSE. SECOND, THE ARAB GOVERNMENT WOULD PROVIDE LL 6-7 BILLION IN CREDITS FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND REHABILITATION OF THE INFRA-STRUCTURE AND PRIVATE SECTOR. THESE CREDITS WOULD BE MADE AVAILABLE TO THE GOL'S DEVELOPMENT AND RECONSTRUCTION BOARD.

9. PORT TRAFFIC INCREASES.

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ACCORDING TO THE PORT COMPANY, 180 SHIPS UNLOADED 159,000 TONS IN BEIRUT IN MARCH. THIS COMPARES TO 133 SHIPS AND 109,000 TONS IN FEBRUARY, AND 76 SHIPS AND 54,000 TONS IN JANUARY OF THIS YEAR.

10. COMINGS AND GOINGS.

A PHALANGE PARTY DELEGATION VISITED DAMASCUS BEGINNING MARCH 30, JUST ONE WEEK AFTER A SIMILAR VISIT WHICH PRODUCED TALK OF A SYRIAN-PHALANGE "SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP." SAEB SALAM VISITED CAIRO ON MARCH 29.
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Message Attributes

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